

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**THE WORKING PEOPLE OF LOWELL
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
MARY BLEWETT/MARTHA MAYO**

**INFORMANT: MARGARET FINN
INTERVIEWER: PAUL PAGE
DATE: MARCH 8, 1986**

**P = PAUL
M = MARGARET**

**86.08
Tape I, side A**

P: So we're here today at the home of Margaret Finn, and we'll be talking about your life here in Lowell, in the Acre. A little bit about your family, your past. Um, I just... Maybe we could start off with your, your own parents. Did they...

M: Well my father was born in Brooklyn, N.Y. And my mother was born in England. And they met here in this country. My father's family came here to the Acre in Lowell to live.

P: Yup.

M: And ah, my mother came as, from England as a young girl, eighteen, nineteen years old. And she settled in the Acre, and they met at a dance. And they were married in, on ah Rockdale Avenue. That's in the, the Acre section of Lowell, in 1899. I was born...

P: But they met, they met in ah, in this country?

M: In this country.

P: Are they from, by any chance, the same area in Ireland?

M: No. My father's people, I don't know what part of Ireland they came from, but my mother's people came from, went from Ireland to England as, as the farmers to ah, do farming work.

P: Yah.

M: And then my father got married in England to an English-Irish woman. And then my mother was born, and there was ah, two girls, and three boys. So my mother came out here to this country to an aunt.

P: Hm.

M: My mother's, my grandmother's sister. She brought my mother out here. Well like I say, was saying, when they came out here to this country, they had to have a job for them people.

P: Yes.

M: And they had to have a home for them to live in or they couldn't bring them here. They couldn't get off the, the ship. Wherever, and in Boston, wherever, you know, I imagine it was Boston, because my aunt would never... my great aunt never went any further than Boston herself, because she was from England too. But ah, they settled here in this country. So my aunt brought....My great-aunt brought her over here, and then they brought my mother's sister over here. But they had, also had to have a job and a place for them to live. They couldn't come in here unless they had. They couldn't get off the boat. But...

P: I didn't know that.

M: Oh, yes! You didn't bring nobody over from the foreign countries here then without having something for them to do.

P: Hm.

M: So they, my, they settled here. So my mother and father met at a dance. And then they got married. And they settled in the Acre section of Lowell, on Fletcher Street. And I was born on Adams Street.

P: Yeah.

M: In 1900. I'll be 86 years old in April. And ah, my father and mother settled in the Acre. And they, we lived on Adams Street, then we moved to Suffolk Street. And I was five years old when the St. Patrick's Church was on fire. And I remember my mother bringing in the vestments from the church, to save them from the fire, and giving coffee to the firemen. So then my mother, we, I am the oldest of 15 children. And there is six of us living. And my youngest brother is 25 years older than me...younger than me. (P: Hm) So ah, we settled in Lowell, in the Acre section of Lowell. So we lived most of our life there. Well they, they wanted to know of me how the people got along. Now when the Syrian people and the Greek people moved into the Acre, they settled in Suffolk and Adams Street, and down through Marion Street, and up through Salem Street, and out

through that way. But, they got along very well. Like, there, there was no big fights, or you can't live there, or you can't live here, or I can't live there. Everybody was good to one another. And they were, everybody helped one another out. If you were sick, and I knew you were sick, and you had little children. Well if I was your neighbor, I'd go and help you to take care of those children, until you got well. There might have been little scraps when, like I said, about if they were on games on the Common where they'd be playing volleyball, or baseball, or something. And if they, one team won and the other one didn't, maybe they'd have little scraps that way. But everybody helped one another years ago. It isn't like now. Where nobody helps one another, and you could be dead next door, and nobody would know you were there. This wasn't the way things went on. When every woman was having a baby, years ago, they had no doctors. They had midwives come in. And I, I remember my mother, my sister, one of my sisters is ten years younger than me. And my mother had to get midwife right up until then to come in my house. We never knew what it was to see a doctor come in our house. And when the doctors came, they said, "Did they come with their cars and everything." They didn't have cars when they came. They walked, and carried their bag in their hand. But, and people helped, were good to one another. And I said, in the Acre section there were plenty of work. There were plenty of factories and everything in the Acre, that everybody took, you know, had things to do. Now where I lived, I lived on Rock Street for a good many years, and Willie Street. Well they had shoe shops there. They had wire shops on Broadway. They had carpenter shop. They had the Plush Mill. They had the laundries. They, well, there were five different shoe factories in, in those two streets, Broadway, Willie Street, and Rock Street. Foster's, Pilling's, ah, there was another one up the corner of Rock and Willie Street. I can't remember the name right now. And all these places, they're, it was like twelve o'clock noon the people would come out to go home for their lunch, from twelve to one. Well you'd think it was a circus coming through. There were so many people that come through the streets and go back to their work. And there was plenty of work for everybody. Then down through Liberty Square, they call it Fletcher, Adam, Suffolk, and Rock Street all met. They call that Liberty Square right there. (P: Hm) Well there was always somebody around. You know, there was factories there. There was Parkard's Bobbin Shop. There was a Mohair Plush Mill that, it was real prosperous. It wasn't like it is now at all. (P: Hm) You, no... You wouldn't believe. I went over through there about a month ago. I couldn't believe around Broadway where the city stable used to be, where the city barns and everything is over there, I couldn't believe what was, the difference in that section of the city now.

P: What do you mean?

M: Well it has so... It's dilapidated. It, it is nothing. There were beautiful homes over through there. And all nice Irish people, well-to-do people. Like, well-to-do at that time. Not millionaires like they are now, but people that were well-to-do. There were bakeries and in the house bakery. A Mrs. Talty had a bakery on Fletcher Street where you'd go. Every day she'd bake cakes, and bread, and everything. And ah, Zip's Bakery. That was Lavery's Bakery years ago. (P: Hm) And all these places. Every, and the buildings were all so beautiful that all the Irish people came and settled here, the biggest part of them. And not only that, you used to see the Greek people getting off the trains with their

packs on their back and bringing them in. And they go down Suffolk Street to Market Street to live. Nobody bothered one another. Years ago the men... I used to go down...I went to St. Patrick's School and was married there, and christened there, and everything else. And my children were all brought up there and christened there. And these men used to sit and they used to have like a big bowl. And we used to think it was water. And that was like some pipe that they used to sit and smoke it, you know, in the sidewalk. But nobody bothered them like you do now. You wouldn't dare sit. I wouldn't dare go outside my door here and sit on the sidewalk all day. I wouldn't know who'd come along here. As much as this is a, this is a nice neighborhood we live in here. Now I don't say. But you're, you're afraid to go out. You were never afraid to go out in the Acre years ago. You could come in all hours. Nobody'd bother you at all. But it's different now. And they were prosperous. The people...prosperous in one sensible way. You never knew anybody that was on relief, hardly. That, that was a thing we never heard anything about. Everybody worked, and there were plenty of work around that way. I... Well I...

P: Where did your parents work?

M: My father worked at the Water Works for years before he died. But my father worked in the Saco Lowell Machine Shop on Dutton Street. And then he went from there to the Locks and Canals. And then he went to the City of Lowell and worked in the Water Department. Well we didn't, they didn't make much money. My father worked for seven dollars a week in the Saco Lowell. And then he left from there to go to the Locks and Canals because they paid ten dollars a week. Then he went to the city. We he went to work on the city, he got twelve or fourteen dollars a week. But, things were different. They weren't as expensive as they are now and everything like that. We all got by on it, and it was no pov... not as much poverty as there is, even now with all this money people are making. But I can't understand it, because how we had to live years ago and everybody got by on it. But ah, there was plenty of... The Acre in Lowell them years gone by when I was growing up was like a little city in itself. And there was plenty of work around for everybody. There was Hanson's stables. There were blacksmith's shops, there were all kinds of work that anybody could get a job at. Maybe they didn't pay much money. But it was work and everybody worked and went to work.

P: Your mother didn't work.

M: My mother worked! My mother worked in...

P: Even with all the children she had?

M: My mother worked in the mills. She worked in the Appleton Mill, and she worked in the, ah, oh up on Broadway was a mill way out there on the end of Broadway, Pawtucket Street. I can't think of the name of the place. But she worked in the mill there. But not all the time, but when she had time in between. When I was growing up, when I was able to mind, you know, big enough to mind the kiddos, (P: Yah) she went to work to help my father out.

P: Right.

M: And my mother baked, my mother baked her own bread, seven loaves of bread a day she used to bake. And...

P: What time did she get up in the morning to do that?

M: Oh, many, oh, many times my mother was up early to put my father out to work, and get up and get a big breakfast for the... the kiddos used to eat a breakfast that time. You wouldn't go out without your breakfast. You had to sit down and have the meal. And ah, made her own pies and everything else she did, and sewed.

P: Did she, ah, do embroidery work or knitting or...

M: She, she did any, embroidery, she did everything. She never went anywhere. She never went, you know, she was a mother. She was always home. When we were there, she was there for us, you know. But ah, my mother lived till she was seventy years old. And we, we left the Acre to go to the Highlands. I think it was in 19, 1940 or something like that. Yeah, around 1938, something like that, my mother bought a home in the Highlands. And they went up, they went there to live. But ah, I...

P: Your mother? Your parents?

M: Yah. But I ah, I went to the, left the Acre and went to the Highlands. And I wasn't too long in the Highlands, about maybe ten years. And I come back over here, because my son bought this house over here. He was only nineteen years old when he bought this house.

P: Now you know you were saying that the Acre used to be like a city within a city, but it, it couldn't have been. I don't see how it could have been a city, though. I don't somehow understand that.

M: No, it was just. Ah, they called it the Acre. That was all. But I mean, they had everything in it. They had stores, they had markets, they had ah bakeries. They had everything in it. And work for people, there was plenty of work. There was a white hall on the corner of Rock and Willie Street that, and it's a big building over there now. I see where they're going to make it into some historical place over there. And the people that worked in that white hall, they made underwear, ah, undergarments for women up there. And then underneath that was a shoe shop on the two bottom floors of that. And then Foster Shoe was down the street. And that was right on Willy Street. And up on Broadway there was another shoe shop at Mt. Vernon Street. Oh there was, it was a lot of work in the Acre for people. Then the gas house, men worked there. There was plenty of men worked up there. And in fact, one time there was a strike up there, and Mr. Hetherman got shot. He lived at the corner of Rock and School Street. He was the boss at the, ah, Gas House. And they had a strike there in...

P: When was that? Do you know?

M: Oh, I don't... I can tell you when. My daughter is fifty-nine years old yesterday. Well it was fifty-nine years ago. It was around the time she was born. We were living on Rock Street. And they, Mr. Hetherman got killed. He got shot there. He was a boss in the Gas House. And, you know, up at the Gas Works up there too, years ago they used to put up balloons up there. And they'd have these great big gas balloons and they'd have all seats in the Gas House yard. And people would go up there to watch these balloons go up in the air. Well I, I think I was about ten years old when that happened, was happening. And there were, thousands of people would come from all over to up there to see those balloons go up in the air, gas balloons. But there was always something to do in the Acre for some people. But it's certainly, ah, not that much of anything over there now for anybody. Everything went out.

P: Hm. So you, so you, a person could live in the Acre and not really have to go anywhere else in the city.

M: You didn't have to go anywhere to shop or anything. Well, I mean, you could... Now whenever... You take from, on Broadway. It must have been... Well there was a drug store at the corner of School and Broadway. There was one at Willy and Broadway. There was one at Adams and Broadway. There was another little variety store which sold drugs and things at the corner of Suffolk and Broadway. Then there was a vocational school at the corner of Broadway and Dummer Street where the housing project is now. Where boys went to learn how to... my husband learned his job there. Carpenter work. He went to school there. And ah, it was an old vocational school. The first vocational school that went up there was there.

P: Did ah... So the city ran?

M: The city of Lowell run it.

P: Yup.

M: Yah. And they moved from there down to ah, French Street down through that way you know. But that's where it started, right there at the corner of Broadway and Dummer Street.

P: Did, did your husband ever work in the mills or...?

M: No, he worked as a carpenter. He went to work, and he went to school. And then he got work. When he got work he went out working nights. He went back to school nights at that vocational school to learn his trade.

P: When did, where, when and where did you meet your husband?

M: Why, he was one of the neighbors that lived, we lived in the same neighborhood right at Rock and Willie Street. There were two blocks there. We lived in one block and he lived in the other.

P: So that's how you met?

M: That's where, where we went to school together. Yah, we were school companions. But ah, there was plenty of work now. He was one of nine children. He was...his mother had seven boys and two girls. [Telephone rings. Tape turned off, then on again].

P: So...

M: I said we lived at the corner of Rock and Willie and it was called Haymarket Square. That was where... there was a big sign there on...

P: Just like in Boston.

M: Yup. It was between the two blocks. It said, "Haymarket Square." And ah, we had...I lived there. When we went there and there was no lights, you know, there was no electricity, no gas.

P: Yah.

M: We had lamps. So she said, "How did you," you know. I said, "We have kerosene lamps that we hung on the wall." And then we went to gas. And from gas we went to electricity. So she said, "Well, what did you do for a pass time?" She said, ah, "You didn't have radios?" I said, "No." We didn't have radios or TV. Well, we'd...they'd play cards, or they'd come home and we had the record player, you know, and you'd wind it up.

P: Yah.

M: Little round records. You'd wind that up.

P: Are those the kind that had the big speakers?

M: Speakers, yup, great big horn like you'd have on it.

P: Yah.

M: Well then they went from that to radios. There was a man in our neighbor that lived in our block that put radios together. So then he sold them to us. So we all had radios. And then he went from that to the TVs, you know.

P: Yah.

M: So when we got TV, of course, we were in... a neighbor... my husband... I was married at the time TVs came in, or even when radios came in. And ah, my husband was one of the first to have a TV. And we'd have the loud speaker on that. And everybody'd come when there'd be a boxing match. They'd all sit on my porch and put the TV out there and watch the TV. But, you know, I said, it was plenty of things to do, because you ah, you had...oh, and if you had a piano in your house you were very rich. You...

P: I noticed you have a piano here.

M: Oh, yes. I told her. I was telling her, I said, "I used to walk down Dutton Street and look and see people's houses. They were little cottages on Dutton Street." And people that have a piano, you could look right in their parlor window. And I used to stand and watch the piano in there. You know the... Oh yes, I had...

P: Did you... Did you play yourself?

M: I did. I played.

P: Yup?

M: That is, that is a Gilbranson out there. That's a Gilbranson player that I have out there, yes.

P: Oh. Do you still have, ah, the rolls?

M: I have, no, no. I haven't even opened that piano for ten years. I don't even play now, but I used to. I was the one that used to play in ah...

P: My, my uncles, my great uncles (M: Yah) had player pianos too. And he used to tell... he used to say how everyone had, everyone would have something, like a piano, (M: Oh yah) or a player piano. A player piano was more special than a regular.

M: Oh yes. If you had a player... I paid seven-hundred dollars for that player piano to Bon Mache. And I bought that sixty-two years ago. My daughter was three years old when I bought that, sixty-four years. Sixty, yah, four years old, and I've never parted with it. It's there, and we never bother with it. We never... I haven't had rolls on it for years. But...

P: What kind, what kind of music did you used to like to play?

M: Oh, I used to like any songs that came out. And ah, my, when my kiddos would be alone, we'd be alone Sunday night and I'd play for them. And they'd be singing a mile a minute on that piano. I gave every one of them lessons, but none of them took any interest in it at all. I was the only one ever bothered with it. But you know there was always something; there were games and things that you would play. They'd play cards, or the kids would play dominoes where the big people would be playing cards. There

was always something that. So she said, "How about hot and cold water. Did you?" I said, "We have no hot and cold water." We had cold water. We had no bath. We had a toilet in the hall as you come in the back door in the hall." And "How did you take a bath?" I, my mother boiled the water on the stove, and we had a wash tub she put in the pantry, and put us one at a time in it. And put the clean water in it. And that's what we did until, well, the first time I had a bath tub, I think it was fifty-nine years ago when my daughter was born, when I moved into a different house on Rock Street that had a bath in it. Before that they took baths in the bath tub. I had a tub that looked like a bath. And we used to fill that and put it in our pantry for them. Oh, that's the way we lived, but we got along. We were all...

P: How did you heat your house?

M: We heated up with wood and coal, you know?

P: Yah.

M: And we, we had the coal. When my daughter would go up the railroad track at the end of Willie Street and pick the [unclear], the coal up there, and then come home and we'd have the coal and the...

P: Oh, you mean stuff that would fall off the train?

M: Off the train, sure. That's what she did, or you could go to the gas house. They used to sell a bushel of coke for a quarter. And we'd go there and we'd buy a bushel of coke up there for a quarter. And that's how you heated your home. (P: Hm) You didn't have ah, furnaces like you have here in these, in our homes now.

P: Did um, you know, coal, burning coal is dirty.

M: I know it, very dirty, and smoky and dusty. (P: Yah) But that was soft coal too, believe me. It was a dirty, dirty job, but you, this was the way you had to live. There was no other way. There was no baths and furnaces them times in the homes. There were great big blocks that you lived in then. I think there was twelve... No, three, six, nine, nine and nine, eighteen. There was two blocks together at the Willie Street there. There was eighteen apartments there. So they didn't have... You don't have no baths. You had a toilet in each hallway. Each one had their own toilet and that was it. As I said, we got along just the same. We had to.

P: Did, did your parents, ah, did they ever...did they ever...Did they buy their house or rent it?

M: No, they didn't. They rented. Ah, we had...the last place we lived on Rock Street, my mother had an eleven room house, and it was a rental. And that had no furnace in it, either. It had stoves on each floor. And ah, the woman...my mother wanted to buy a washing machine and she asked the woman to put electric wiring in for her. But she

wouldn't do it so my mother moved out. And they bought a home up in the Highlands. And ah, they didn't have, I'm telling you, they didn't have that much money to put down on a home. We...Everywhere my mother went to tell them she had fifteen children, she couldn't get a house. Nobody wanted her. So we walked and walked for weeks and couldn't find a place to live. But finally my mother seen this place on Leroy Street in the Highlands. And the man was remodeling it. So we went in and we asked him. And so he said, no, he wanted to sell. Well my mother said, well, she didn't think she could buy because she didn't know if she had enough money to buy. So anyway, she had five-hundred dollars. So the owner, the man that was remodeling it, took a second mortgage on the house so my mother could buy it. (P: Hm)

M: So that's where she's...she, my mother lived till she was dead, till she died on Leroy Street. (P: Wow) So.

P: Who was the, who was the man? Do you remember?

M: Oh, I can't think of his name. He was from the Highlands, and he lived up in the Highlands. But he felt sorry for her when she told him she couldn't find, or get a place, and nobody would give her a place with all the children she had. So he took the second mortgage. But I know my mother paid the second mortgage off in three years to him. And ah, and I think the, the house was only five-thousand dollars that she bought up there. (P: Oh)

M: But ah, it was good.

P: Would you say your mother had the largest family around?

M: She sure did. [Laughs] There was nobody around us that had that many children, believe me. Yup, my brother is twenty-five years younger than me, my youngest brother. He's still living. But ah, no they...It was hard to get a place to live anyway at that time, because there were, houses weren't as plentiful as they are around now even.

P: Yah.

M: But ah, we... I lived right next door to my mother in the cottage. In fact, my mother lived in the cottage at 34 Rock, and I got married and had one daughter. And my mother moved next door to get the eleven-room house, and let me have the smaller apart...ah, cottage. So then when my mother moved, I moved, because I didn't want to be next, you know, I wanted to get away from next door neighbor, whoever was going to move in there. So I moved into an apartment there to get on Rock Street another apartment. But then, ah, I stayed in the Acre till I ah, I... My son, the youngest boy was three years old when I moved up to the Highlands. But I didn't care for the Highlands. I didn't, and I moved back, back over here. We moved over here, thirty, it will be thirty-six years this month that we lived, moved here.

P: I was just thinking of um, the fire you were talking about at Saint Patrick's.

M: Yah.

P: How did that fire start?

M: Well we never, I never knew how it started, but oh it was a terrible, it was a terrible fire. And ah, we lived right next door to it. We lived at the corner of ah, Suffolk and Cross Street, which was right next door to the...Well there was a, it was one house in between the church and our house. And ah, of course my mother was right there and we were only, I was only a young. I was five or six years old. And I remember, ah, all the firemen running in and out to my mother to get coffee.

P: And did you have water piped to your house?

M: Oh yah.

P: Yah.

M: Yah, we had, we had ah... So then when I moved to these different apartments, it was hot and cold water and everything in it, and a bath and everything in it. So, you know, we went into better locations as the children got bigger.

P: Hm. Did ah... Did ah... During, during the year of Prohibition did your...

M: Oh you...you...that lady asked me, she said, "What about the speakeasies and the, you know, the beer kitchens?" (P: Yah) I said, well, I never knew. There was plenty of them in the Acre. There was plenty of them around. Like in, naturally enough the...everybody was making home brew and making the... I said one time my husband came and he, my husband took a drink. So they said that they wanted to make home brew. So she said, "Well how, how did you make it?" I said, "Well, you had to put a big copper kettle, um, copper boiler that you bought. And you bought this Hopson Malt. And you put it in a pillow case. And you boiled that. And the smell of your house would knock you out. (P: [Laughs]) And then you, after that you took a butter tub, a wooden butter tub, and you put that in it, that liquid in a butter tub. And you put yeast cakes with it, and sugar and stuff, and you let that rise. And you skimmed it off every day, every day, the top of it until it got clear. And then you bottled it." And I said, "I made it once and the house smelled so bad. That was the end of home brew, for me making it in my house." But plenty of people made it, we knew in the Acre that made it.

P: Yah.

M: But ah, a lot of them, a lot of them sold it. A lot of them just made it for their own use. We made it that time for my own use, and that was the end of it. Because the odor that, your house, you could smell your house a mile away. They had the smell the hops and malt. It was boiling. So I said, "Yes. My husband drank that." It was the only fault my husband had, that he drank. He was a beautiful carpenter and cabinet maker, but he

took a drink and that was it.

P: Yah, yah.

M: Thanks to God, my, I got two sons that never touched a drink in their life yet.

P: Yah, too bad. Some people used to make wine. That would have avoided the smell.

M: Yah. I never made wine. No. I know they did, yah. But there was, like there was plenty of people down around Suffolk Street, and Fenwick Street, and down through that way that made it. The Greek people and the Syrian people, they made it and they sold it down there. But ah, they made the whiskey and everything I guess.

P: Was it usually the men who would drink and not the women so much?

M: Oh, I, yah, mostly men. I never seen many women go and drinking that stuff, but of course the men did make it.

P: Yah, yah.

M: My husband always got to have the bottle of beer in his house. He, of course, when Prohibition was over, they'd buy it, but... (P: Yah)

M: And no more making with...the odor of that was enough to kill you.

P: When you, when you had people visiting you, where would, would you go to the kitchen or did you have a parlor?

M: We had a parlor. And of course, we had a couch. Not like these, now, the old fashioned couch. They were iron, and you'd pull it out and make beds out of it at night. We had a little parlor. Yah, my mother always had a little parlor. And the kitchen, mostly sat in the kitchen, talk and they'd have tea and whatever cake, or buns, or whatever my mothered make, they'd have it. Lots of company, we had plenty of company come.

P: Did, so your mother made a lot of...did a lot of her own cooking?

M: Oh, yes, always.

P: Right from scratch.

M: Right from scratch. It was never no baker stuff. My father never, we couldn't, he couldn't even listen to the word bakery for bakers bread. He had to have his home bakery. Ah, my mother...

Tape I side A ends

Tape I, side B begins

P: Did your parents leave anything? Did they hand something down to you after?

M: My parents didn't leave nothing to any of us. Why, they never had anything to leave.

P: They didn't come here with anything.

M: No, no. And then my father, in fact ah, we, you know, different ones of the family keep asking me. Course I was the oldest. I'm the oldest of the family. And they keep asking me, because they want to make up family histories.

P: Yah.

M: And they'll ask me about it. Well we never knew too much. My father never talked too much about his family at all. So we never knew too much about... I know he had three sisters and two, two brothers. We knew them. I knew them. My younger part of my family never knew them, because they were mostly dead by the time they were born. But I knew them. What I tell now, when I tell my sisters about them, and they say, we never knew them. My father never talked much about his family. But my mother did, used to tell us about her family and what, how they went from Ireland to England when they had the potato famine, or something. You know, where they'd have to go and dig. At the farming they used to leave their... And like, she said, when she was growing up in England, they used to call her dirty Irish, because her people came from Ireland to England to work the farms. And that's how she was born in England, you know.

P: Hm.

M: But she's said when she got out over here, in America, they said she was dirty English, you know? So you know, she said, gee, it was funny because ah, her family are all Irish people. They were all Irish, you know? But um, my mother had, during the War my mother had a nephew, ah, a niece's husband that came here, and he was stationed in Boston and ah, on a ship. And ah, he used to come every weekend and spend the weekend up in the Highlands with my mother. And, you know, he used to buy things and show my mother what to do. Like, he'd buy, ah, say a slip for his wife. You'd wash that and you'd put it in your, you know, your trunk. Well you could take that back to England with you, you know, when your ship went in. (P: Yah) And if you bought, he'd buy a doll for one of his children. He was married and he had a couple of children, this boy. And he'd break the arm off, like, of the doll. And he could send that home. And he bought a fur coat here one time for his wife on Merrimack Street, in a place they used to sell these fur coats cheap. [Dimmer Dammers?] was the name of the place. It was on Merrimack Street, way up near Moody Street. And ah, he bought a fur coat and he took the buttons off it, and sent it back, you know. And silk stockings that they couldn't get in England, he'd buy them here. And wash them and roll them and take them home. And, you know, we used, we heard more about my mother's people than we did about my

father's, because my father wasn't, was a very quiet man. He never talked. He never had much to say. He was, he worked two jobs. He worked at, ah, a CYML. Ah, this was an organization in St. Patrick's Church. The men belonged to it. And he used to be the janitor there. It was upstairs on the top of the boy's school. And he was the janitor up there at night. So he'd go up there at seven o'clock at night and he wouldn't get home until twelve. So he never had too much to say. He was a very quiet man, my father. He never had too much to talk about., but my mother would do all the talking.

P: [Laugh]. Why would this, why would this man break off the buttons and the arm?

M: Well, you couldn't, didn't have to pay duty on them then. You'd, you'd have to pay big duty on everything you brought over from here, you know, when you'd get it over to England.

P: Okay.

M: And if they were used, that would be used, you know,

P: Oh yah.

M: It would be something that you wore, you know. Even to wash the things. It would be something you wore. So that was in order to not to pay duty on them. So this was the way these sailors that came in here used to do this stuff.

P: Yah. So you used to help your mother out with the work.

M: Oh yes I helped. My mother and I had three babies together. My, when my brother was born in June, and I had a daughter in October. And ah, I had a sister born in November. And my daughter, oldest daughter, was born in April, March I mean. And then I had another brother born in January and I had a daughter born in, ah, April 9th, yah. So my mother took care of me and I took care of my mother when we had babies.

P: [Laugh]. And what were some of the things, jobs your brothers and sisters would do?

M: Well my brothers, now, one of them just retired from Raytheon. He's been there for, ah, since 1950, Raytheon. He retired last week. And I had another brother retire two weeks ago. He was sixty-two years old. That's my youngest brother. And he retired from Stop and Shop. He'd been there for forty years. My sisters worked in the, ah, Wood Heals in Lowell here. And now, then, when the Wood Heals went out, the last one that worked, worked on the city, another one of them, and another one of them worked in Honeywell. She retired two years, three years ago, from Honeywell. I worked on the city for twenty-five years. I worked as a matron. I retired in 1970 as a matron of the Joseph Pine School, and I worked in the cafeteria. So I put twenty-five years in on the city.

P: Oh yah.

M: I'm a retiree from the city.

P: Yah.

M: Yah. Then I worked cleaning offices at night in the Sun Building, and downtown. And that... and I did cafeteria work, Cracks in ah...

P: Cracks ah, Cookies?

M: Yah, cookie place. And ah, I worked for Charlie Cullum there. Took care of the cafeteria there at night in order to make up my social security. So that way I have two pensions. So...

P: Ah, that's good. Did ah...did your parents ever ah...were your parents involved in working in politics at all, or?

M: No, my father never much of a politician because he worked for the city.

P: Hm.

M: And he never... He was a private chauffeur for Brown when he was mayor of Lowell. And ah, he worked for the city. But he ah, he never was one for politics, or my mother either. They never were. But I was the politician in the family. I worked for Jimmy Curley. (P: Yah) And I was a campaign manager for him here in Lowell. And we had a headquarters over at Towers Corner. And I worked for ah, Phil [Billman] and Clinton, and David I. Walsh and Clinton. And they got me jobs at Fort Devens. And they, during the war, which helped me quite a bit. When Fort Devens closed, that's when I went to work for the city. But ah...

P: What do you mean closed?

M: Fort... Well close, you know, it didn't really close. They turned into a college for a while up at Fort Devens.

P: Hm.

M: And that's when I left. And I came...Because I could have got a good job up there and worked in one of the college houses. But ah, see, I had my family and I had to be at home with them at night, where I would have to stay up there at night. So I had to give that up. And that's when I went to the city for work. But while I was at Fort Devens I was a, I worked as a matron in buildings up there. And I'd come home nights. I could come back and forth. But see when that went out, it was 19, what, 40? I think it was something like that. I went to...

P: How did you become involved in all this political activity?

M: Well at that time I worked for WPA. In fact there was quite an article in the paper yesterday about WPA, and the river out in Pawtucket...you know, the Pawtucket, Merrimack River flowing over there. So I worked making sand bags to that night. All one day, and all night, and all the next day, without even going home from Dutton Street Building down where the Giant Store is. We made sand bags for that flood. Because I taught sewing to these...we... I was one of the seamstresses up there at the WPA. And I taught them sewing when we used to make nightgowns, and dresses, and pajamas and things for the give away to the poor that time.

P: Hm.

M: Well then when you had to, in order to get on those jobs that time you had to be a politician, because you couldn't get a good job. You might get a job that would pay twelve dollars a week, but, of course the better job was paying sixteen and eighteen dollars a week. So if you were in with the political gang you got that good job. So that's, when I started, went into politics, I joined the Curley Club in Lowell here.

P: What was, what was the Curley Club?

M: Where we had a big club here in Lowell, the Curley Club, the women in Lowell. They used to have meetings when Curley was in office, Governor.

P: How, how many years was he in, in office?

M: Well I just don't know just how many years he was in, dear. I...

P: Was he mayor, or?

M: He was mayor of Boston. He was governor.

P: Oh, I didn't know he was governor.

M: Oh, yes. He was governor. And ah, that's how we got in the Curley Club. And that's how I got into politics. I joined them. And that's when WPA was going in. You could get a job on WPA if you were in with the politicians. Course you needed it, you had, I needed it.

P: So you, you didn't, but who did you know that helped you get into the club?

M: To get into the club? The lady's name was Theresa McDermott. She was the head one over at...

P: Oh.

M: Mrs. Theresa McDermott. She was here, one of my friends in Lowell. And she was

the head one in the... So I was one of her pals. Course we all went into her club. And many days we went into Boston into Curley's house on a Saturday morning, and here is all on the kitchen floor with all these bushel baskets full of food that he used to give out every Saturday out of his own kitchen to people that were poor down in Boston. No, she was the head one of them in Lowell here.

P: And the Curley Club was all, for all women?

M: All women, and what a club that was, believe me.

P: [Laugh].

M: And we had a, and Curley came to Lowell, and to talk when he was governor in Boston and he was getting re-elected. They had a parade for him, the depot for him, all the way down, ah Middlesex, Merrimack Street. Ah, down Central and up Merrimack and around to the auditorium. They had a big party at the auditorium for him. We all marched in the parade at night.

P: What are some of the things that this club used to do?

M: The, well, they were very good. They used to work for, you know to, to help people out.

P: In the city here?

M: People that needed it, yah. Like people that had a, wanted to get on aid that couldn't get on. They'd helped them out. They'd go and see to their homes and look and see if they needed it. And they'd go down. And we, they knew the head ones at City Hall. Whoever was the mayor there and who was over the relief like it is now, you know. They knew and they'd go to the front for them, and get them things, and help them out, and help them to get jobs. Help them to get on WPA. Was ah...the WPA, big projects up on Fort Devens going on. They used to take bus loads of men up there every day from the square.

P: What would they do? What were they doing?

M: To work. They were building the Fort Devens. They were building up in Fort Devens, you know, building that place all up.

P: What year? Do you remember what years?

M: It was 1934. Ah, it was... I was in Fort Devens right up until 1942 I think. Yah, 1942 when I left up there. It was all that time, about ten years.

P: Wow! Long before the war.

M: And they had a big place down there at the Giant Store. They had two floors. (P: Who did?) The women used to sew there, and the men had a project down there. They had offices there and everything. The whole top floors there.

P: Hm.

M: And then they used to give the food out in different sections of the, they had a place on Fletcher Street on the corner of Christian Street. They had another place over on Jackson Street where they give out all these garments that they made. And they give out food over there.

P: Who, who was doing it?

M: The WPA.

P: Oh, yah. For free?

M: For free.

P: So it was like welfare.

M: Yah. It was on, like a welfare project, yah.

P: Except, except it doesn't sound like, it doesn't sound like these people were permanently on welfare.

M: No, no. (P: It was just...) All this stuff, if you, if you were on WPA and you needed, you know, if you needed the jobs, you'd, they'd give you a card and you could go over to these places and you could get... they used to give canned meat. They used to give oranges, grapefruit. They'd give all kinds of stuff. Oatmeal, butter, fish, God I'm telling you, they had flour, all free to the people that needed it.

P: Wow. And this is during, when Curley...

M: Curley and all them were in office.

P: So you feel that he was a good governor?

M: David I. Walsh was the, was, what was he? He wasn't governor. He was, he was from Clinton, but he had all this, you know, the Massachusetts District. (P: This district) And they gave, they gave out cards, you know, to people that were needy. And many people got it that didn't need it too, as well as people that were needy. Believe me, I'm telling you.

P: That's the nature of politics sometimes. (Laughs)

M: That's right. Yah, that's right. But ah, hey, they did good with it anyway. It was nothing like it is now. And I said, they said, well what about when they had all these rallies and everything? I said, they did have these rallies. They had them on street corners. It ain't like they are now. You go now to these parties, the first thing you know, every time you go to your mailbox you got tickets in your mailbox. Twenty-five, fifty and a hundred dollars, parties for them that's all running for office. There was nothing like that years ago. You went to the parties, you went to the street corners and you ah, they talked and they told you what was what. Today it costs you a mint to go in politics. Every time you go to the mailboxes a couple of tickets from some one of them looking for twenty-five or fifty dollars off you, if you're foolish enough to give it. I said, I don't bother with politics no more. I'm not involved in them. I know who'd I like and I know people that's doing good for people. I think there's a lot of the men that are really sincere, but there's a lot of them that's in it for their own benefit, that's all.

P: Yah.

M: I really do think so. I can't believe what's going on at all. Cause it was nothing like this years ago.

P: Nothing like what?

M: The men. The men would be on the street corner and they'd get up and tell you what they could do for you, and what they didn't do. And they'd ask you to be with them. And you run... I had a rally in my own home for ah... They had one of these big wagons that had music outside my door. And I lived on Rock Street. I never charged people fifteen, ten or twenty or twenty-five, or even five dollars to come in my house. I gave the party and I gave refreshments. And now everywhere you go it's money, money, money.

P: Who was that rally for?

M: That was for Curley. That's the time Curley was running for office. The last year he come, he lost. I never dreamt he'd ever lose out. But they had a rally and they had a big party in the Boston Gardens for him and everything. And there were millions of people there. And then the next day he lost out in the polling booths. So you can't believe this stuff, you know. All these people that you have, you never can depend on them, because the next day they can put their cross where they feel like putting it.

P: So do you think like the ah... Do you feel that the politician in your day were more held responsible to the people who elected them?

M: They really were. (Repeats) They really were.

P: They kept, you help them, they help you. (Laughs)

M: They did. That's right! And it didn't cost you like it's costing you now. My son is Deputy Chief of Police.

P: Yah.

M: But he's not, he's not a poli... What I mean, he's not like his mother. He never was and he don't bother with too much politics on his job. I mean he, you know he doesn't... He knows who he wants and that's it. I know he's not a politician. I know that. Very quiet, very quiet guy.

P: So no one in your family is political?

M: No, no, no. They don't ah...

P: They don't know what they're missing. (Both laugh)

M: They don't know. They don't know. My other son has been thirty-eight years with the Currier Citizen, the one upstairs. He's been thirty-eight years in the Currier, as a boss in the Currier Citizen. They're not in politics, no. They're not, they didn't go in like their mother did, you know?

P: Do you see any of your old friends at some of these...?

M: Yes, I require... I know quite a few of them. Like I know [unclear]. I go to different parties, different parties that I have gone to. The boys get tickets, they give them to me and I go. But ah, I have known quite a few of them. You can't, in my position right now I can't be with anybody, really, because where my son is in his job, politics has a lot to do with his job.

P: [Unclear]. Yah.

M: And I can't be out front for anybody. There's nobody I work for no more. I meet them and I thank them and I know who I want, or I know who's doing the work that I think is doing it and I vote the way I please, but to come out front for anybody now, I couldn't do it. I can't do it on account of the boys.

P: Hm. Um, I bet if you... Well, this sort of changes the topic, unless you want to...?

M: Oh no, go on,

P: I was just noticing, you decorated your house and you're wearing green today and you have a lot of... [Both laugh]

M: I'm Irish for today.

P: Actually, I was riding my bike through downtown, and I noticed a man outside the Old Worthen, Old Worthen Bar there.

M: Oh yah!

P: And he was wearing a bright green sweater. I said, "Oh, it's Saint Patrick's Day!"

M: That's right. That's right.

P: I wouldn't have... I was just, and I was mentioning how it doesn't seem to mean as much to me as it does to other people. I just don't know where that, where the meaning of the holiday comes from.

M: Well it's just been, you know, it's just a family tradition right down. As you grow up, you grow up with it, you know? And well, St. Patrick's Day was... Of course I went to St. Patrick's School and I grew up in St. Patrick's Parish. Naturally I'm for that parish. Like I love St. Patrick's Parish, because that's where my children were all born there, and I was born there, and my family were all born there. Naturally you, that's your, you feel towards that. Right down here, I'm thirty-six years here. I couldn't tell you two priests that live, that's down here. Well I don't go anyway. I go down to St. Francis, a little church down here on Methuen Street. I go down there, because it's a small little church and I like it. And my daughters, they have the car, and I get in the car and they take... But, you know, you always felt that way. Anyway, you grow up with that feeling because it a brought up in you I imagine, that you're a little prejudice towards these things. My feeling towards St. Patrick, it doesn't bother me. I just put it on because the kids will say to me, "Ma where's your green?" you know? (Laughs) Now yesterday...I have a crowd every Sunday for dinner. I had fourteen yesterday for dinner. And of course we had a little, well it was my daughter's birthday anyway. We had a cake and everything. Of course they all come in, they said, "Oh sure Ma, you've got your green on." I said, "Sure I have. I have to with this gang around here." But ah, you know, it's just a tradition that's been in the family for years, I guess. They have, they celebrate St. Patrick's. But they do more down through Boston than they do around here, I think, with it.

P: And did they, when you were younger, did people do more, or?

M: Yah, we always, you know we were really brought up that way anyway. They'd always celebrate St. Patrick's Day. There'd be a parade somewhere. And the Irishmen in the AOH, they'd have a parade, or a dinner somewhere. We always grew up, we had that.

P: What's the name? AOH?

M: AOH. Ancient Order of Hibernians? Is that it?

P: Oh!

M: Yah. They've got a big club downtown, and my father belonged to that.

P: What are they? What do they do?

M: They ah, they have ...

P: Is it a secret type?

M: No. it isn't a secret type of a thing. It's very open. There's all, there are a lot of the big politicians in Lowell belong to that. They had a banquet... They had a party at the Speare House Saturday night, a big party. They have it every St. Patrick's, a dinner.

P: Oh, what does it mean? I don't even know what the word means. Order of...

M: Ancient Order of Hibernians.

P: Yah.

M: I don't know what it is. It's an Irish organization anyway.

P: Oh yah.

M: Yah.

P: So ah, would you say you usually... I don't know how the ... Would you say you usually voted for Irish politicians, or it didn't matter?

M: No it didn't matter to me. If a Man is a good man I vote for him. If I think he's going to be good for the city and good for people, I think he deserves a vote. You know, you... It doesn't matter to me.

P: I was just... Yah.

M: Dewey Archambault was French, and I voted for Dewey Archambault. I knew him very well. He was a Mayor of Lowell.

P: Oh.

M: And it doesn't, you know. A man is a good man, that's who we want (P: Yah). We want somebody that's going to do good for the benefit of the city. It ain't always the one you think is going to do the most, that hollers the most either. We had ah, we've had a lot of... Well Dewey was the only French Mayor I think we've had. But Dewey was a good mayor.

P: Well I think Lemay was a Mayor.

M: Yah, Lemay in the later years. Yah, I don't... These young guys in the politics now, I'm not familiar with them at all. You know I don't I don't know too much about them. I don't bother with them that much no more.

P: So do you remember... ?

M: I've slowed down a little bit. (Laughs) I had to.

P: What were some of the things you used to do on St. Patrick's Day in the past?

M: Well most of the time we worked, (laughs) because we didn't get days off. It was working, you had to work.

P: You didn't take the day off?

M: They didn't have... No! I did not. If I had a job, I had to go to my job. I never took the day off. We'd go if there was a party or dinner somewhere. We might go at night, you know. I'd buy a ticket and go. They'd go to the Speare House. For years I have been going to the AOH parties. Now St. Patrick's has them down here at the Windsor. They've had them now. They had one Saturday night. I didn't go this year though. And I didn't go last year, because I had a grand daughter got married on St. Patrick's Day last year. So that took up our day last year. I didn't go this year.

P: So is St. Patrick's Day a big day generally?

M: It was a big day generally, yah. Yah we always had someplace to go. And when we worked, we had to work because you didn't get it off. In the places where you worked, you worked just the same. Even at the schools, they have school. They don't have St. Patrick's Day off. The only school that has it off is St. Patrick's I guess.

P: Well were there special foods you would make on...?

M: Oh corn beef and cabbage. That's their dinner. That's the Irish meal, corn beef and cabbage for St. Patrick's Day.

P: And you all...?

M: Not for me yesterday. I didn't have it because I had it two weeks ago. So we wasn't going to have it again. But I had turkey yesterday for them. But no, we didn't have corn beef yesterday.

P: Why do they have corn beef and cabbage?

M: I don't know. But that's just the Irish meal they claim. I don't know. That's what they serve everywhere, corn beef and cabbage.

P: When you were ah, when you, when you were younger with your parents, do you remember some of the Christmas presents you would get?

M: Oh! God bless us, yes. Well we were a big family. So we didn't get too much. What I mean, we, we got enough. We got enough to take care of us, but we always had a Christmas tree. My father even had to go and cut it down someplace. And he worked at the Water Works up on Pawtucket Boulevard. And like at Christmas, he'd get it up that way. They'd cut a tree down. He'd always get one to bring home for us. We always had a Christmas tree. That was one thing we always had. But ah, Christmas in this house, this is wicked here in my house here now. Of course I have twenty-five grand children and I've got twenty-four great grand children. So Christmas here is one big day. They never go to bed all night, the night before Christmas. They have a party upstairs in the house and then they come down here and we're here Christmas Day. I'm, I've always got a gang here. Thanks be to God! I'm glad because, what would I do? I don't go out that much. I go out, but I go to church. I make sure I get to my mass on Sat... I go Saturday night. My daughters take me. I like to go to mass, but I don't go out much during the week, because there's nothing to do, you can't go over town. You can't walk over town, because there's so many, you know, there is so much traffic and there's so many kids around, hanging around. I shake all over going over through Merrimack Street there. You know, there's so, sitting around.

P: Where did you use to go when you felt safer there?

M: Well I used to like to go downtown. I used to like to go shopping when there were all the different stores down there. Now, like on a Saturday afternoon one time in Lowell, you couldn't get through the crowds of people on Merrimack Street. There'd be so many shoppers and everything. You'd love to go over town.

P: Well wouldn't you feel...? To me it'd be more threatening to be in all those people that...?

M: But those people were not like the people, the kiddos today. The young boys and the young kids today that are sitting around those benches downtown there. They put those benches downtown. Well I thought was to help old people out. Could you go downtown and get a seat on one of those benches? Crowded with high school kids all the time. And you walk along, and you ain't safe walking along Merrimack Street. I wouldn't go over to Merrimack Street for the love of the money right now. You couldn't pay me to go over Merrimack Street! No way!

P: So you felt though, that it was safer [unclear]?

M: Safer years ago, my God! You, Saturday afternoon down on Merrimack Street, you couldn't get through the crowds of people that would be down there. And everybody would be dressed up going down shopping. You're downtown now, there's nobody there. You're afraid of your life to walk up Merrimack Street. I am! I wouldn't dare do it. I go. They take me down. I get off the car and I go in the, whatever office building I have to

go in. They let me out of the car. I used to go over to my daughter. She worked at the High School, to get a ride home. I wouldn't dare walk around the stores downtown.

P: How about all the different ethnic groups though, that were in the city, like the French? They didn't bother you?

M: Those people never bothered you. You really, really and truly those people all, they kept to themselves, and they did for themselves. They never bothered you like the kiddos downtown now, and the young folks downtown now. But you don't dare walk down on Merrimack Street and a woman with her handbag. Your bag is gone! No, I wouldn't. I'm perfectly satisfied to stay at home, and take me out in the car and bring me back home again. I never want to walk downtown, never. I'm afraid. I'm really scared!

P: You know, we were talking about the piano before, (M: Yah) and the record players. Well one thought came to me. I was wondering if you had, well I asked you if you had any special records or music or... nothing has survived since?

M: No. I haven't even got a roll. I haven't had a roll since I moved over here. I think I got rid of all ...

Tape I, side B ends

Tape II, side A begins

M: And higher through the mail, because you don't know what section you're getting.

P: Yah. So...

M: I have gone. I'm going now. I'm ready for a trip now. My son owns a place in Boca Raton. We're leaving the 29th of April for ten days, or two weeks we're going. We go there every year.

P: That's nice.

M: But we don't go till March or April. And ah, I've been to everywhere there could be. I've been to Ireland. I've been everywhere, thank God.

P: Oh you have?

M: Yah. I really have. I've gone on a good many trips. I think there isn't very many more now I have to see. I don't travel so much now, but I did right up until a couple of years ago. But ah...

P: You've been to Ireland once?

M: Yes. I went to Ireland. I was there for St. Patrick's Day Parade one year. We went with the Sacred Heart Band, through the Sacred Heart Church. They took the band over there to March in the parade. So we went there. And Ethel Sampson was with us. She was Mayor of Lowell at the time.

P: Yah.

M: Yah, we went over with them. I thought it was the most beautiful site I ever saw. Coming in, in that Shannon Airport is the most beautiful site you ever saw in your life. There's so many different shades of green in the grass and everything in the ground. That you can't mention a shade that isn't there. It is a gorgeous site to come in there at the Shannon Airport. And everything was beautiful over there. I thought it was very interesting, really. Yah, we were there for the parade. The band at Sacred Heart was in the parade that year. So we went over there with them. They run the trip from the Sacred Heart Parish. So I went with them. It was really something to see. I'd love to go back, because I went to Shannon and Galway. I didn't get to Dublin. I would have like to have gone to Dublin.

P: Yah.

M: But I didn't get there you know. I was always wishing that I could get back to see it, but I guess not now I won't get back. They won't let me travel that far no more.

P: Who won't? Your children?

M: My family. My family won't let me travel that far alone, no. You know, I don't go alone anyway. I had friends that went with me. But they won't let me. They say, "Ma. no, too late now."

P: You were talking about these curio cases, the little wooden... You say your husband made those?

M: I think he made those, yah. Those are reproductions of antiques those were. He worked for Pratt, Amos and Pratt Wood Work. It was on Dutton Street in the Acre in Lowell. And they went into the reproduction of antiques. That's an antique. That chair.

P: This chair?

M: That was what they called a chair for ship, on board a ship. They used to have one of the ship's chairs. And they went into that kind of thing, beside the altar railings and [unclear] that they used to make. So they were making quite a bit. Good profit on that, but they went out of business. Of course they all died. The families died and the younger ones didn't take over, you know. But ah, those are antiques, those things. They really are.

P: Who gave you the little figurines? Are those Hummels?

M: Those are...no they're not really Hummels. They're not real Hummels. They're just... These, the candlesticks here are made out of (screwls?) you know?

P: Oh!

M: I can show you this.

P: Right, oh I see.

M: See, they're made out of (Screwls?). And ah...

P: Screwls?

M: Yah. You know, they use to hold... When ah, these, when you put wood together, (P: right) when you're making things and you wanted to glue wood together, you screwed them together with them, see. And that's what they made them out of.

P: Huh. Did your husband ...?

M: My husband made those, yah.

P: These are nice.

M: Yah.

P: They...

M: See, that screws off (P: Laughs). That screws off. He made those. I wondered whether he had a [unclear]. And we have, like everybody that come in and say, "Oh I love them," and I'd give them. So now when my own family are dying to have, you know, wishing to have some of these things, I haven't got them. I gave them all away. But, that's the only...I have those two. And my sister has one. And then I have a cabinet in the kitchen that he made with little shelves. That's all I have. Everything he'd give, he'd make, he'd bring the stock home from work. You know, things maybe was a flaw in it or something. He'd fix the flaw in it and make them up at home and they'd have them. And everybody would come in, I'd give them. They'd say, "Oh I love that." I'd say, "Here, take it." I didn't realize. I didn't realize that there was any value to them, you know?

P: Yah. Well that's ... A lot of things people have, they just, they don't think there's any value to them.

M: No, this is it.

P: Like...

M: And the same way today. I crochet, I crochet.

P: Still?

M: Oh yes. Make bedspreads and everything, all those afghans.

P: All these things?

M: Yah. I make these. I make a lot of novelties and things, baby blankets and everything.

P: You knit too?

M: No, crochet. I do crocheting. I know how to knit, but I don't more crocheting than knitting. Now this is a hand knit, but it isn't me. A [unclear] friend of mine made me. But I do this and everybody comes in and I give them some. I say, "Here, take them." You know? All novelties that I make, you know? And they laugh at me. My girls will say, "Ma, all you do is buy yarn, and you give everything away." I say, "Yah." I have baby blankets and everything that I make. "Take them." But it's just something to do. I love to do it. I sit there all day long and I just crochet all day long and make...

P: So...

M: It keeps me busy.

P: Oh, I see.

M: It keeps me busy.

P: You're working on one [unclear].

M: Oh yah, I have... I can show you. (She takes mike off to show him something)

P: So you, how did you learn to ah... ? Who did? Your mother taught you?

M: (Speaking without mike, can't hear her)

P: Oh yah. (Laughs) A little duster.

M: Yah. [Unclear, speaks away from mike]

P: So you're still making these kinds of things?

M: Sure! [Unclear, speaks away from mike].

P: Well this is basically the kind of...

M: That's your duster.

P: Yah.

M: And that's, the head goes on through the head. (Describes something she's made).

P: Oh yah.

M: You put a hole at the top of the head. You put it right through (unclear-can't hear). I tell them that I think more of these than they do their cabbage patch.

P: Oh yah, I would too.

M: I really do.

P: Yah.

M: It's ah, hey they're cuter!

P: Maybe you could sell them.

M: Oh, I have ah...No, I don't sell nothing. Like I said, my family told me, they say, "All you do is buy yarn and give it away when they come in." But it's just something for me to do, that's all.

P: Yah.

M: Keep me busy. It helps me to pass the time away. I said, you got to really have something to do or you'd go crazy sitting around doing nothing. I don't smoke. If I smoked I know... And I don't read. I couldn't get interested in a book, but I do this all day long.

P: Yah!

M: Just something to do.

P: Yah!

M: I said, "I love my dolls."

P: Well I know it takes all day to do these. (Laughs) But, it takes all your concentration to do this.

M: Concentration, yah, but I watch TV while I'm doing it. I turn the TV, and have the TV on, and I do it while I'm watching TV. My daughters will say to me, "Could you put it down please and come out and eat?" [Laughs] It's just something to keep me busy, that's all. You have to have a hobby of some kind.

P: You have, you have like on your chair a...

M: These are, yah.

P: Is that knitted?

M: No, that's crocheted too.

P: That's crocheted?

M: Yah.

P: That's a finer...

M: It's a finer thread, yah. That's a thread and this is yarn, see. I do all those, make all those little centerpieces for my doilies. I make them all for the ... It's just something to keep, keep my time up. I have to do... You got to have a hobby of doing something, because you'd go crazy just sitting doing nothing. I would, I couldn't do it. I can't sit and do nothing. It just keeps me busy, that's all.

P: You have a lot of little...

M: Knicknacks and things?

P: Knichnacks in the other room, yah.

M: My grandchildren give me all these things. And great grandchildren now I have.

P: So you have teacups and stuff.

M: Yah. My oldest great grandson is twenty years old. Almost twenty years. He's in state, he's at U.L.

P: U of Lowell College?

M: Yah. He's ah, belongs to the ROTC up there too.

P: Oh, I see.

M: This is his third year up there. And he's got a brother in Saint Anselm's College. This is his first year at Saint Anselm's his other brother. But um, I have twenty-four.

They're all big; a lot of big ones in there, and twenty-four great grandchildren with all the others.

P: So this house you're living in now, did you buy this yourself?

M: No, my son owns it.

P: Oh your son owns it.

M: Yah, he lives upstairs. He's the one that's got the twelve children upstairs.

P: But you've been here...

M: It's a two apartment.

P: I see. But you've been here thirty-six years?

M: Thirty-six years, yup!

P: So, I thought maybe, until after your husband... It's almost the time when your husband died.

M: Well right after that, because he died in forty-six, you know?

P: Yah.

M: And we came...yah we bought... Well my son was in the Navy. And he got out of the Navy. And when he got out of the Navy he bought this house. He was only nineteen or twenty years old when he bought this house. He's fifty some odd years old now. Yah and ah, we bought this. Well we lived on the corner of Wilder and Middlesex Street, over that way. And we were in a big house. I had a nine room house. Now...

P: Is it still there?

M: Yah, it's still there. But the landlord wanted to make two apartments out of it. So he wanted, you know, he wanted me to move. So every spring they'd give me a notice to move and I couldn't get a place. It was hard getting places that way back then. You couldn't walk out and get a place like you can now. So finally this man, a real estate man I knew, he said to me, "Well why don't..." I asked him, I said, "Gee Tom, do you know where I can get a house?" And he said, "Do you want to buy?" And I said, "Buy? Where am I going to buy? I ain't got a nickel." And he said, "Well you can buy a house." Nick's coming out of the service." Coming out of the service, and he says, that time you could buy and you didn't have to pay anything down on it. You know, servicemen didn't.

P: Yah.

M: So ah, I said, "Well I don't know." So anyway I talked it over with my son and I said, "Tommy Markham, I asked him to see if he could get us a place, and he wants you to buy. He knows where he could get a buy." My son said, "Ma, are you crazy!" (P: laughs) So I said, well he didn't have any money. I'm not fooling. I was alone with six kids. I didn't have no money. I had two of them married. So ah, I said, "Well we'll talk it over anyways." So Mr. Markham, Tom Markham called me up and he said, "I got a place. It's in Centraville." And I said, "Oh no, not Centraville. I don't want to live over there."

P: Why not?

M: Well I never wanted to live over here this way. You know, I love the other way. I was so used to the other way. I didn't want to come over this way. So I said, "Well we'll go and look at it anyways." He said, "Come on and look at it." So we came over here and we looked at it. And it was \$9,000 for this house, believe it or not. So I said, "Well \$9,000, my God. We ain't got \$9,000 cents." And I said, "Tommy, you're crazy." He said, "No, there won't be no down payment." He says, "The only money you'll have to pay is to pass the papers." It was \$175.00, and I think my kid had about \$300.00 in the bank, that's all, because he had just come out of the service and he just got working, started working at Currier Citizen. So I said, "Oh God." So he said, "All right. You want to buy it?" And I said, "Well, I talked it over with my son, and I said, well what do you think?" And he said, "Well Ma, that's up to you." I said, "Well let's try it anyway." So we did, and we signed it. And Tom Markham said he never saw any kid that shook like a leaf signing the papers for this house. So we're here. Thanks be to God. It was only \$9,000 we paid for it, and we thought that was a million dollars at that time. But we're here thirty-six years. He wasn't married then. He's married now, thirty some odd years now. But hey, it was a good buy for that money. I said, "We could get that much money tomorrow on it and more." But of course he's got his part, he's got his own apartment upstairs and we're downstairs.

P: And you're other sons lived across the street?

M: No, my grandsons bought those houses. They had those houses over there. They both just sold that one last week across the street here. And the other one sold that before. He's gone. They're buying property all over, everywhere. I don't know. They're doing... They're writing them, business and property buying. The kids, the boys upstairs are on, got good jobs and everything. They got, they're in this contract business now with these platforms or whatever, forms or whatever they are. For these condos, that's what they're doing them for. They've all got good businesses.

P: They're all like ah, around building.

M: Yah.

P: Construction.

M: They bought a lot, they bought a lot of property too. They've bought it everywhere. Boys, they all have good jobs.

M: So they're putting their money, and they ain't got married, and they're putting their money into property. (Laughs) One of them owns a store up Pawtucket Boulevard. He owns a store over in East Merrimack Street. He just sold that now, and he's had the two stores, but he got rid of that one. And ah, he owns a couple of condos someplace.

P: You can't keep track.

M: I can't keep track of them, really. Every time they come in, they're buying someplace. I say, "Why?" They say, "Well Nana, you have to do something with your money you know. You can't pay it all to Uncle Sam. You got to do something with it. I say, "Yah." Taxes I guess. It's high when you have nothing that you have to do with it. But they're doing good. They're doing very well thank God.

P: Well I guess that's about all I can think of for right now. Maybe, do you think we covered a lot of things?

M: I think we did. I think that's about everything that she should know. What she was interested, what she has, she said was with the Acre and what, you know, what they had there.

P: Yah.

M: And how prosperous it was years ago. And what was in there. And it was! Like I say, it was like a little city in itself, because I've had so much to go for. Now everything's different over that way.

P: So you don't even think any of your old friends live there anymore?

M: Some of them do.

P: Yah?

M: Some of them still live over there. I have friends on, people on Wilder Street. They won't sell their place even to the school up there. I have one girl, she lives all alone in a cottage up there on Wilder Street and she will not sell to them. And she's still there. And I think there's only three cottages on the street now, her's and two more.

P: Oh, I know where you mean.

M: Yah, Wilder Street.

P: When I ride ... When I look at them, I say, "It must be horrible living there." The noise, and the people, and the lights.

M: Yah, that's it. She's there and she will not sell. But you know, I think if anything happens to her, her sons are married and got homes. And they won't... And her daughter... They're not going to be bothered with that. They're going to get rid of it. Like she said, "Hey, mortgage is all paid on this place, and I only pay my taxes. And do you think I'm going out paying all these big rents she said, to give it up for somebody else?" She won't. But it's true though, you know? They have all factories that were over there where people could make a living. They're all gone over there now, everybody, everything's gone from the Acre now that was there years ago.

P: So you're not altogether happy with the way things changed?

M: Well, happy. I'd like to see them build, and build it up a little bit and clean it up a little bit. My goodness it's terrible. I couldn't believe it. But everything is so down and those places. Those homes were beautiful, nice homes over there. And the Irish people, there were so many of them, and the French people, and I say Syrians and everything, but everybody kept their places so nice and clean. And you could get a beautiful apartment over there. But now everything is so run down looking. It was terrible. I really couldn't believe. I went up Broadway there, I couldn't believe what I saw. I said to the woman who was with me, "Don't worry, I lived here and it was nothing like this over here when we lived here. I lived here for a good many years. Fifty years, and it was nothing like it is now."

P: Well!

M: But it's just that, you know, people don't care, and they don't take care of their places like the older folks did. I don't think. Look at them. We were proud of the places we lived in. It was so nice. It was a really nice place, but.

P: I guess on that note we'll end our, our meeting.

M: Well I hope you get something out of it anyway. If you get a little bit of something.

P: Oh. I'm sure we will. It's been very interesting. I don't meet many people who are interested in politics. (M: Laughs) Everyone I know is non-political.

M: I know it. Right now I'm not a politician no more. I can't be, you know? I Can't.

P: But once...

M: Much too much at stake really,

P: Yah. Well see, once you're a politician, you're always, you can never change. See, you still show the same political awareness. Just knowing the things you can and can't do.

M: I think it's wonderful that. I really think, you know, what I think now, right now is, I think your old people like myself and everybody else, a lot of people haven't got what I have. They're really down, you know, living on, small checks and everything. And it seems too bad, because the way the prices of rent and everything have gone so sky high, (P: Hm) that you take somebody that's only got one social security check, what can they do? The rents are two and three hundred dollars a month. I couldn't pay five dollars a week one time. It was hard for me to dig up five dollars a week, never mind these prices they're paying now. I said, "I can't believe it." When I hear the rents and the prices of property, I can't really... You know I say...My girls will say, "Well Ma, everything's different now." I say, "Yah, everything's different is right. I'm glad I'm not bringing yous up right now, because I don't know what I'd do." You can't get a house under a couple of hundred dollars for a month. Nowhere, no matter where you go. If we paid, if I was asked for a couple of hundred dollars a month, I don't know where in the name of God I'd get it. Oh of course now I'm on two pensions. I'm one of the lucky ones, lucky enough that I've got both social security and the city pension. But hey, a lot of people haven't got this. There's a load of old people that haven't got this. You just happen to be in luck that you're ... I said maybe I did work till ten o'clock at night, but I'm glad today that I did it. After all I feel independent.

P: Yah. I'll have to... It's a lesson for everyone.

M: I have one single daughter, you know, the others are all married, but I have one single daughter. She'll never get married. And I'm lucky to have her. And thank God she makes a good week's pay too. But hey, I don't know how some... I really pity some poor, when I meet some of the poor friends I have that I say, only on one little bit of a check. How do you do it? You can't. You can't live in a luxurious life, that's a sure thing.

P: So I guess I'll just end the interview.

M: Well that's okay then. I'm awful glad you came, and nice talking to you and you're very nice!

P: Thank you very much.

End of Interview
(JW)